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An Analysis of the Implications of Joint Military Structures in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and Colombia

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An Analysis of the Implications of Joint Military Structures in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and Colombia

**Thomas Bruneau
Naval Post Graduate School**

April 2011

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Executive Summary

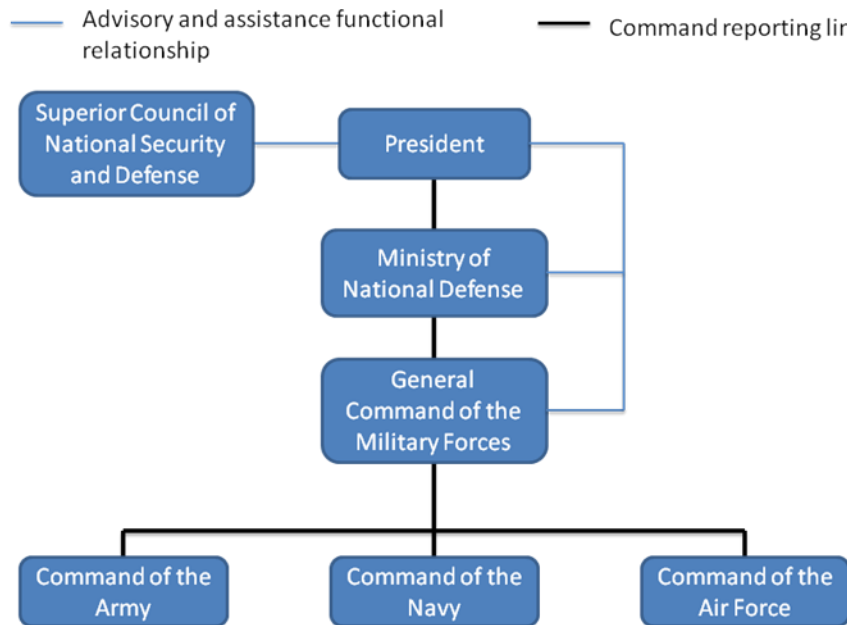
In 2010, the Southern Cone countries of Argentina, Brazil, and Chile established joint operational military structures as part of a more general reform of national security and defense institutions. While it is too soon to assess the impact of these institutional innovations, we can benefit from a quick overview of some of the main points of the successful U.S. effort at “jointness”¹ in the Goldwater – Nichols Defense Reorganization Act of 1986 (G-N). Based on the experience of the U.S., the author is not sanguine that the formal move of Argentina, Brazil, and Chile to joint structures will soon result in an improvement in their joint military behavior. The U.S. Government and the United States Southern Command (USSOUTHCOM) in particular, can increase the chances of these joint structures becoming effective by orienting attention and resources to them and to the ministries of defense (MOD), which has inspired them, and not to the individual services. While Colombia has not mandated joint structures at the national level, it has established joint regional commands that most observers believe have proven effective in fighting the *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC)*. USSOUTHCOM can continue to support these regional joint commands, while also seeking to influence reform at the national level of the MOD and a strengthening of the joint staff. In this paper the author looks at the new joint structures in the three Southern Cone countries and to the regional commands in Colombia.

¹ Here “jointness” means the different U.S. armed forces being able to operate together. It became possible, in my view, because of the requirement for officers from the different services to be educated jointly and in joint matters, and also service in joint billets.

Prior (to 2010) Military Structures at the National Level

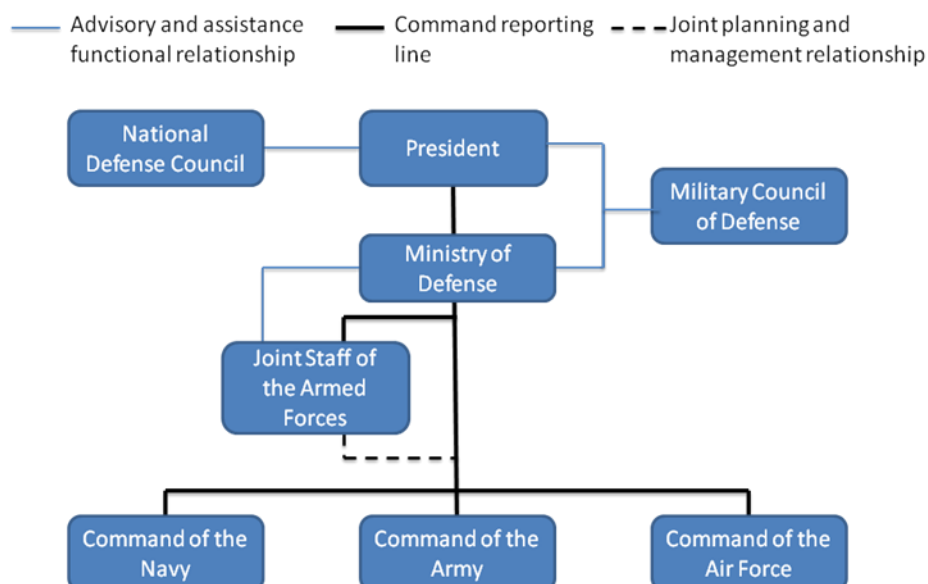
Prior to the 2010 reforms, the military structures of Argentina, Chile, and Brazil, at the national level, did not allocate much power to the Minister of Defense (MOD). There was also very little “jointness”, and much overlapping and redundancy in responsibilities. Figures 1-4 represent the past command structures of Argentina, Brazil, and Chile, and the current command structure of Colombia.

Figure 1: Former Legal Framework and Defense Structure for Argentina



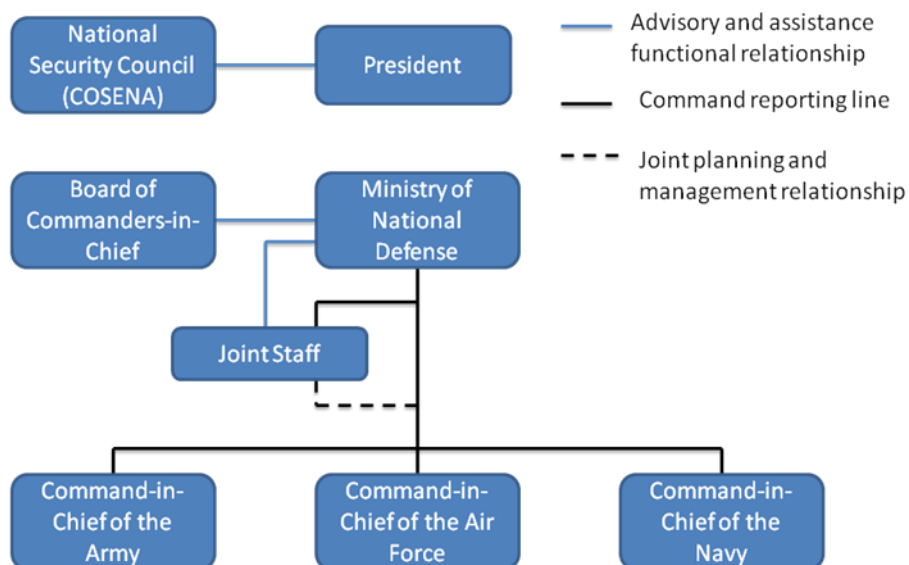
Source: “A Comparative Atlas of Defense in Latin America and Caribbean”, (RESDAL, 2010)

Figure 2: Former Legal Framework and Defense Structure for Brazil



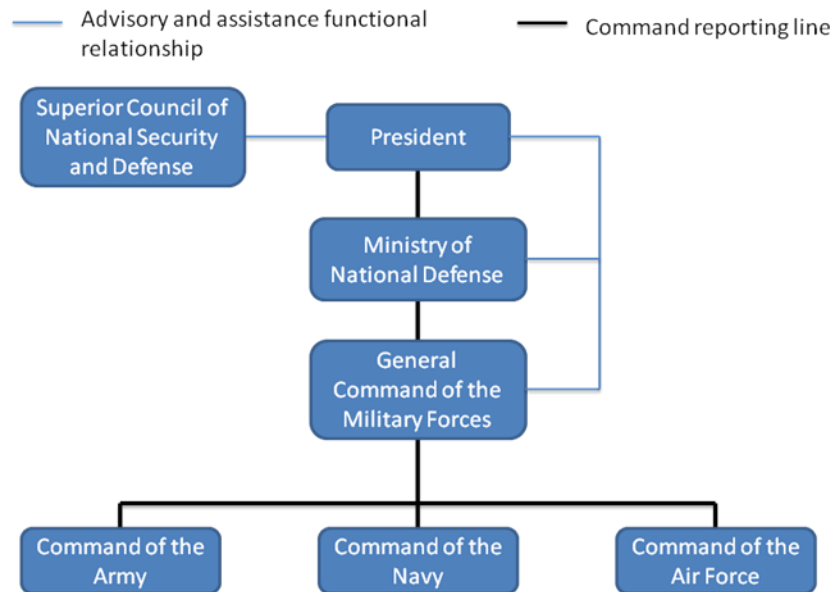
Source: “A Comparative Atlas of Defense in Latin America and Caribbean,” (RESDAL, 2010)

Figure 3: Former Legal Framework and Defense Structure for Chile



Source: “A Comparative Atlas of Defense in Latin America and Caribbean,” (RESDAL, 2010)

Figure 4: Current Legal Framework and Defense Structure for Colombia



Source: “A Comparative Atlas of Defense in Latin America and Caribbean,” (RESDAL, 2010)

There are three important similarities in the three Southern Cone countries (Argentina, Chile and Brazil). First, it took a very long time for the reforms to be passed into law from the beginning of the transitions. In Argentina, the transition began in 1983; in Brazil, in 1985; and Chile, in 1990. Second, the laws that were finally passed, were part of a more comprehensive reform seeking to strengthen the MODs, and thus created the joint structures. And third, either directly, through explicit pressure, or indirectly through exposure in U.S. programs in-country or in the U.S., the reforms in terms of joint structures were inspired by the U.S. experience with the Goldwater-Nichols Defense Reorganization Act of 1986 (GN). Although not officially documented, there may possibly be links to the three countries have peacekeeping forces in Haiti, motivating international interoperability and compatibility as a factor for jointness.

In **Argentina**, although the Law on National Defense had been passed in 1988, it was never implemented. President Nestor Kirchner (2003 – 2007) saw to its implementation in June of 2006 in Law 727/ 2006. This law strengthened the civilian – led ministry of defense, established the powers of the joint staff and took power away from the chiefs of the services.

In the strengthened MOD itself, there are major accretions in the responsibilities in several critical areas of the organization. These tend to follow closely to those suggested by Bruneau & Goetze in their work on roles and functions of ministries of defense. (Bruneau & Tollefson, 2006). In Law 727/2006, the armed forces' mission is limited to external defense and specifically against state actors. Also *directivas* (1691/ 2006; & 1714/2009) following on Law 727/2006, circumscribed the roles and missions of the armed forces. The distinction is made between defense, which is the responsibility of the armed forces, and security, which is the responsibility of the Secretariat for Domestic Security that is under the Ministry of Interior. (It should be noted there is a new, cabinet-level, ministry dealing with internal security the ex-MOD. Nilda Garre, now heads that ministry.) Consequently, the Armed Forces cannot deal with the so-called new threats including terrorism, counter- drugs, and organized crime; what the Armed Forces can do is external peace-keeping missions. This is believed to be a positive area in the overall fairly bleak panorama of the Argentine Armed Forces.

While the laws were passed in 2006, implementing the law of 1988, it was only in December of 2010 that a Commander of the Joint Staff of the Armed Forces was

appointed; and, in Resolution 1633/2010, the structures of the joint staff specified. Appendix I presents the *Boletín Oficial* (Official Gazette) concerning these developments. In short, there is now a joint staff in Argentina, but with the very limited roles and budget (less than 1% of GDP), of the Armed Forces. However, there is a real question regarding the significance of this structural change.

In **Brazil**, *Lei Complementar* No 136 of 25 August 2010 elaborated on the roles of the MOD and created the *Estado-Maior Conjunto das Forças Armadas*. It must be noted that the MOD was created only in 1999. Until then, there were six general or flag officers in the cabinet. Figures 5 and 6 present the Brazilian defense structures before and after the law No 136. All observers agree that Nelson Jobim (July 2007 – present) is the first powerful MOD, and he was able to have a package of laws passed by the Congress in 2010, arguing that these issues were all internal to the MOD. Appendix II presents an overview of these laws. There were four components to the laws, which provided for an overall updating of roles, missions, and structures. The main question now is whether the joint structure will work since, as can be seen in Figure 6, all of the officers at the top levels are four -star, and their positions mirrors to some degree the continuing structure of the three services.

In **Chile**, although there has been a MOD since 1932, it began to change significantly with the democratic transition in 1990. There was, however, no law on its functioning until 2010. (See Appendix III for the law.) The Law led to the creation of a series of new structures within the MOD. Figures 7 and 8 present the Chilean defense structure before

and after the transition in 2010. First, a single Undersecretary of Defense was created by combining the already existing, yet redundant, three departments of the armed forces [for War (or Army), Navy, and Air Forces], which were focused on rather administrative duties for each institution. Second, a Joint Chiefs of Staff was created, which had an operational function related to the joint preparation and utilization of the Armed Forces. It also commands and conducts operations at the strategic level (including international crises management operations, and external wars). Third, a new Undersecretary for Defense Policy Office was created (which was supposed to be staffed with civilian subject matter experts) to develop defense and military policy and conduct the main defense planning (e.g. war plans, joint planning).

In both of these reforms, the competencies of the ministers of defense were increased; and new structures to promote “jointness” in the Armed Forces created, as can be seen from the more detailed before and after descriptions for first Brazil and then Chile.

Figure 5: Brazil Defense Structure before the Law of 25 August 2010



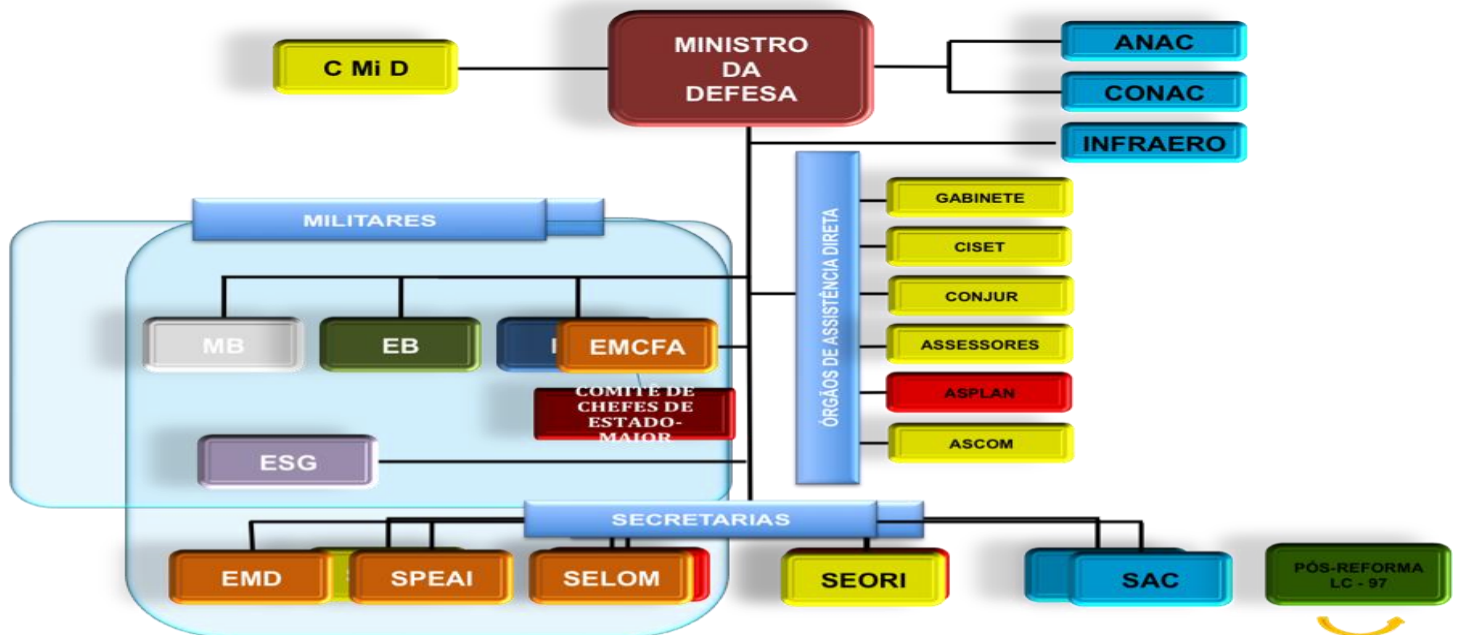


Figure 6: Brazil detailed defense Structure after the Decree Law of 25 August 2010 (above).



Figure 7: Detailed Chilean Defense Structure before the Law of 2010

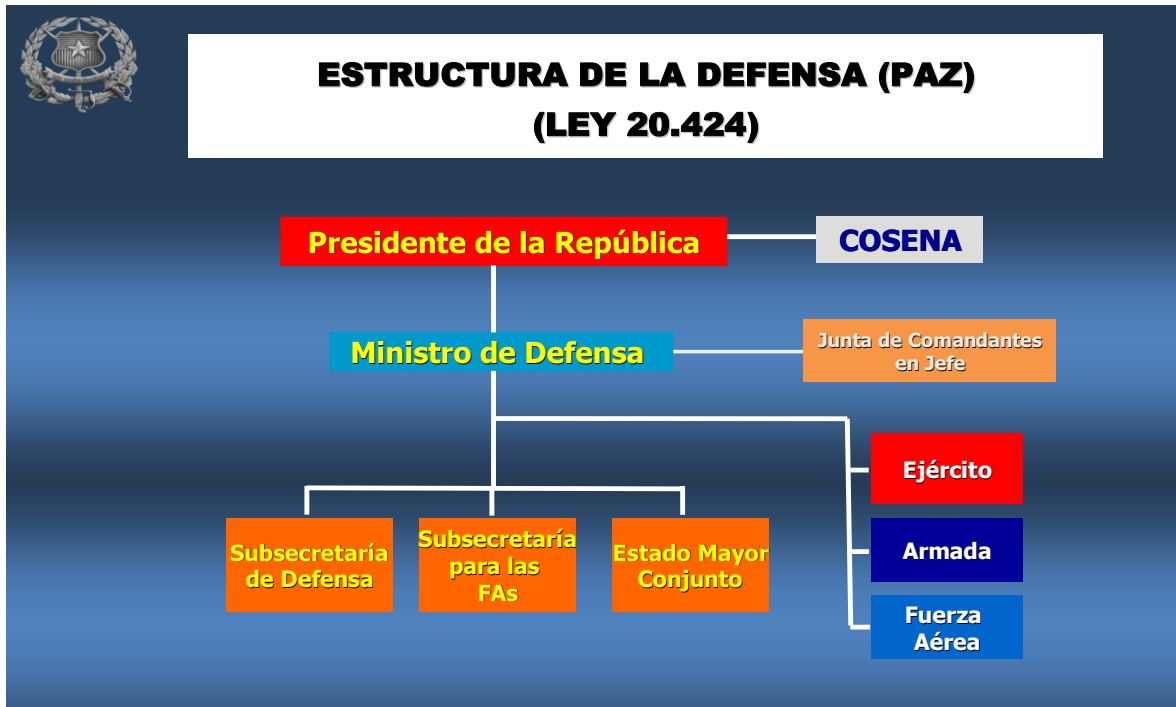


Figure 8: Detailed Chilean Defense Structure after the Law of 2010

It must be understood that the trend, (in at least these three countries of Argentina, Chile and Brazil), towards joint military command structures is part of a reform in civil–military relations. This is in terms of not only consolidating democratic civilian control but also in increasing military effectiveness. In all three countries, the apparent changes towards more joint structures are part and parcel of a reform in which the powers of the minister of defense are specifically increased. The question remains, however, whether there are sufficient civilians, with stability in their positions and expertise, to be able to implement these new structures, and to force independent services to cooperate and operate jointly.

The Likelihood of More Jointness: Lessons from Goldwater – Nichols (G-N)

There is a double relevance for analyzing the current Latin American efforts at establishing new joint command structures of the U.S. experience at achieving “jointness”. First, as noted at the beginning of this report, either explicitly, through pressures on civilian officials and military officers in the region, or implicitly through readings and courses attended by these same officials and officers, U.S. officials and officers have emphasized the importance of “jointness”. Second, a real (versus shallow) understanding of the U.S. experience can allow us to better evaluate the likelihood of these new, formal structures taking on meaning and content.

As stated in the Introduction to “Beyond Goldwater - Nichols: Defense Reform for a New Strategic Era” states (CSIS Report, March 2004, p. 12):

“In the mid-1980s, a series of operational military failures in the field – the botched attempt to rescue the American hostages in Iran, the Beirut embassy bombing and the interoperability problems during the invasion of Grenada – convinced Congress that the Department of Defense was broken and that something had to be done. Despite intense resistance from DoD, over four years of Congressional hearings, investigation, and analysis finally culminated in the Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986 (Goldwater-Nichols) – a landmark of U.S. defense reform.”

There are four points that should be emphasized regarding G-N and its relevance for “jointness” in these three countries. (See the references to Barrett, Locher, and Roman & Tarr). First, there had long been a deep awareness in the U.S. of the institutional impediments to the combat effectiveness of the U.S. Armed Forces. It required, however, several operational failures to galvanize support for the major reforms embodied in G-N. Second, the success of G-N, that was the last major reform of U.S. national security and defense (although there have been 21 largely unsuccessful efforts between 1986 and 2008) was a bipartisan effort. Third, as the U.S. executive (mainly the Department of Defense) would not take the initiative in institutional reform, it was the U.S. Congress that finally took the initiative and passed the reform, over the opposition of Secretary of Defense Weinberger, Secretary of the Navy Lehman, and virtually all of the uniformed heads of the services. While there were many reasons for resistance to the changes included in G-N, the main opposition was due to perceived loss of autonomy for the services, and for Secretary of Defense Weinberger, the perception that the reforms were a criticism of his stewardship of DoD. And, fourth, G-N is based on incentives; if an officer aspires to become an O-7, he or she must do JPME and serve in joint billets. The authors of the G-N law specifically based their strategy for its implementation in the services on incentives.

In Argentina, Brazil and Chile none of these key drivers for reform, resulting in “jointness” in the U.S., apply. First, in virtually all of the reforms, which focus first on the MOD and then on the joint staff, the emphasis is on asserting civilian control and not achieving effectiveness. Here effectiveness means the ability for the forces to in fact

implement the roles and missions they are entrusted with. Second, as none of the armed forces in these three countries are engaged in combat, there can be none of the catalytic effects arising from operational disasters which demonstrated again and again in the former U.S. system. Third, none of the Latin American congresses have anything like the power and sense of power that the U.S. Congress embodies and exercises. If the model of reform in Latin America, as in the U.S. is G-N, then it appears very unlikely that “jointness” will catch on. And fourth, none of the MODs or joint staffs in South America gives any indication of the use of incentives, or disincentives, to promote the support of officers of joint structures and processes.

In **Colombia**, it is interesting to note that Figure 9 (also included in Appendix IV) does not even include the MOD in the Command Structure. Despite U.S. efforts in the early period of the presidency of Alvaro Uribe (2002 – 2010), there was minimal reform of the MOD. As the then Minister Marta Lucia Ramirez remarked, “There is a civilian minister of defense but not a civilian ministry of defense.” The phenomenon of joint commands is separate, unlike Argentina, Brazil and Chile, from MOD reform. The stimulus for “jointness” arises from the need to fight the FARC, and other illegal armed groups.



Figure 9: Detailed Current Command Structure of Colombia at the Level of the Armed Forces

In the late 1990's to early 2000's, the establishment of area joint commands started (Joint Task Force South and Joint Task Force Caribbean). These early attempts lacked real control over units. The next iteration was to transform Joint Task Force South to the now Task Force Omega. The difference was that Task Force Omega had units permanently assigned to it from most of the forces. They were given the authority and the resources for mobility to move anywhere tactically needed. This reorganization proved very successful because the military was no longer constrained by operational area boards, which the FARC took advantage of to escape pursuing military units. The combination of service capabilities into one planning group also facilitated intelligence, logistical and combat support efforts. (See Porch, 2111).

Based on the success of Task Force Omega several other JTF were created. The largest of which is Joint Task Force Pacific 2009, to fight the FARC in the Pacific region. In 2010, Gen. Freddy Padilla de Leon, Commander of the Colombian Armed Forces, wanted to have a seminar with general officers from all of the services to discuss the success of Joint Commands in their effort against the FARC and other illegal armed groups. All of the current, and some of the former, JTF Commanders were present with the services' Vice-Chiefs (later to become the current leaders). The U.S. expectation for this conference was that the idea of "jointness" showed benefits and utility for the war against the illegal armed groups, and that the recommendation would be to continue. Several comments in the open forum from the general officers present were that there is no doubt that "jointness" has helped; but how to replicate (quickly) the success in the rest of the territory. They further suggested that there was no room for service specific military districts, as the Army is divided today. The ideas were that the entire country should be divided into Joint Commands (COCOMS) in which all military assets would belong to one Commander. This would obviously facilitate combined operations, and it would also focus all coordinated operations with the Police. (At the time this report is being written no published report on the seminar is available. See Estructura Seminario presented in Appendix IV).

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About the Author

Thomas Bruneau is a Distinguished Professor of National Security Affairs (NSA) at the Naval Postgraduate School. He joined the NSA Department in 1987 after having taught in the Department of Political Science at McGill University in Montreal, Canada since 1969. In addition to his position as Professor in the NSA Department, Professor Bruneau was the Academic Associate for the curriculum in International Security and Civil-Military Relations from its founding in 1996 until 2002. Between 1998 and 2001 he served as rapporteur of the Defense Policy Board which provides the Secretary of Defense and his staff with independent and informed advice on questions of national security and defense policy.

Dr. Bruneau has published more than a dozen books in English and Portuguese as well as articles in journals including *Latin American Research Review*, *Comparative Politics*, *Third World Quarterly*, *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs*, *Journal of Latin American Studies*, *Encyclopedia of Democracy*, and *South European Society and Politics*. He received a Ph.D. from the University of California at Berkeley. He was a Fulbright scholar to India (1962-63) and to Brazil (1985-86), and has been awarded fellowships from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, the International Development Research Centre, the Rockefeller Foundation, the Gulbenkian Foundation, and the Luso-American Development Foundation.

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